

# **Chapter 4**

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## **Communications & Coordination**

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The Battle Creek Rapid Assessment involves scientific, technical, and social elements. While science and technical analysis may lead us to the correct decisions from a resource perspective, the effectiveness of, and support for the decisions (or lack thereof) is what will make or break the success of our efforts. This communication strategy aims to increase public confidence that the Battle Creek Fire recovery issues are being handled responsibly, therefore increasing our chances for successful implementation.

***Objectives of the strategy are:***

- People will understand what is being done, why it is being done, where it is being done, who is doing it, and how long it will take.
- People will know how they can get involved.
- Messages will be clear and consistent across agency boundaries
- Messages will be timely and easily accessed.
- A communication infrastructure will be further developed within the community that will continue to be useful beyond the recovery effort.
- The Strategy will provide a mechanism for feedback to the implementation team and other land managers regarding the effectiveness of recovery efforts and public information.

### Problem and Opportunity Statements

The recovery efforts of the Battle Creek Fire present both problems and opportunities in terms of communicating with the affected and interested public.

***Problems include:***

- Lack of understanding about the role that the various agencies will play in the recovery (who's responsible for what, and who's going to pay).
- Misconceptions about what forest "recovery" means, and how quickly the forest will "recover."
- A sentiment among some that land managers should be doing more to prevent future crises (flooding, mudslides, debris flows, etc.), or to repair past ones (the burned forest).
- A short time frame in which to make and communicate decisions regarding impact mitigation, travel management, safety, and hunting season.

***Opportunities include:***

- A community audience that is receptive to fire-related messages, including fire behavior and ecology, fire impacts mitigation, fire prevention, and landowner responsibilities for developing fire-safe property.
- Unprecedented opportunities to work with other land manager partners, community partners, media, and individuals to further develop both short and long-term community fire information resources.
- An enthusiastic volunteer workforce that can be developed into long-term forest stewards and agency partners.

**Recommendations**

- Implement the “Beyond the Burn – Battle Creek Rapid Assessment Communication Strategy” for both short and long-term priorities. The strategy includes key messages and talking points for all communication-related projects, public meetings, and media events. It also describes tasks such as the development of a traveling exhibit, presentations to groups and businesses, media relations, and other items.
- Develop a set of volunteer projects for interested parties that would like to contribute to the recovery of national forest lands. Coordinate closely with other agencies and landowners.

## COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

The Battle Creek Fire Recovery provides a tremendous opportunity to further develop an interagency structure for current and future multi-agency fire recovery efforts. Because of this opportunity, the Black Hills NF supports the creation of a Recovery Assistance Center (RAC) that will help communities, individuals, and agencies work together in the recovery efforts of the Battle Creek Fire. The RAC could also provide assistance to those affected by the Grizzly Gulch and Little Elk fires of 2002. Most importantly, the RAC could be poised to provide immediate assistance to those impacted by future fires in the Black Hills.

The RAC will need to be interagency, to address recovery issues such as:

- Wildlife habitat and use issues
- Weed infestations
- Soil erosion, and protection
- Salvage of fire killed trees
- Revegetation of burned land
- Tourism associated with outdoor recreation
- Protection of property from post fire floods
- Insect and disease outbreaks
- Road and trail damage
- Disaster preparedness
- Defensible space

Assistance can be provided through the following agencies:

### **Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)**

RC&D can assist in the recovery of human and natural resources following wildfires. Staff can provide guidance to the local sponsors in the delivery of technical assistance to landowners within their District.

### **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

The NRCS and Pennington Conservation District located in the Rapid City Field Office can provide conservation technical assistance to private land owners affected by the Battle Creek Fire. Information and assistance can be provided on seeding recommendations, erosion and sediment control practices, and other vegetative and/or structural practices such as dikes and diversions.

A number of sites have been identified by the BAER team as being at risk as a result of the increased flows associated with the Battle Creek Fire. If a request is received from a local sponsor, these sites will be evaluated for potential assistance through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program.

NRCS is responsible for the EWP program. The overall objective of this program is to assist sponsors in implementing emergency recovery measures to relieve imminent hazards to life and improved property created by a natural disaster that causes a sudden impairment of a watershed's function. NRCS provides assistance to prevent damage from flooding, runoff and erosion, and reducing the threat to life and/or property.

If funding is available, NRCS can provide financial assistance covering up to 75 percent of the construction costs of eligible emergency treatments. Local sponsors such as state, county or Conservation Districts may apply for assistance. Local sponsors of EWP projects are responsible for formally requesting assistance, obtaining necessary permits and land rights, providing 25 percent cost-share, and providing for the operation and maintenance of completed measures.

There also may be funding available through various state sources as the implementation unfolds.

#### **SD Division of Conservation and Forestry (SD DC&F)**

SD DC&F can provide assistance to private landowners to determine what fire-damaged trees should be removed from private land. No cost-share monies are currently available for salvaging burned timber.

Cost sharing through the SD RC&F may be available in the future for replanting areas of high intensity burn.

Cost-sharing assistance is also available through the Bark Beetle Program for removing and disposing of trees infested with mountain pine beetle or Ips (the beetles must be active in the tree).

#### **Pennington County Fire Administrator, Volunteer Fire Departments, South Dakota Division of Wildland Fire Suppression**

These groups are available to provide information and technical assistance for landowners interested in developing defensible space around their homes.

#### **Pennington County Weed and Pest Supervisor**

The Pennington County Weed and Pest Supervisor can provide technical assistance regarding the treatment of noxious weeds.

#### **South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks**

SDGF&P should be contacted regarding wildlife depredation issues.